Wolves

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Wolves

by air_of_the_Waterfall

Summary

Hannibal is afraid of a winter storm, so Will and the dogs cuddle up to help him through it.

Tut, tut, tut. Tut tut tut. “This way, everyone! Hurry, hurry!”

A soft voice whisper-shouted into the dark, directing five curious dogs.

In navy-stained darkness, Will grumbled awake to the racket of claws on hardwood. His pack trotted quietly and contentedly through the bedroom, tails wagging attached to dark silhouettes of various sizes.

Sitting up with a stretch, Will blinked and mumbled, “What are you guys doing?”

They appeared to have a goal, as they ignored him and continued on their way. Only Winston Jr. glanced at him, then swerved to sit loyally at his bedside. Still not quite awake, Will chuckled and leaned down to scratch his ears. The other four disappeared into the black void of the closet. That was strange… Hannibal never left errant doors open, and the dogs knew they weren’t allowed in the bedroom.

The closet door creaked as it gently swung shut. Outside, winter wind caterwauled over their snow-dusted property.

With a start, Will turned and found Hannibal missing from their bed. The blanket on his side lay carelessly tossed, and the warm sheets still held his shape.

“Hannibal?”

Rustling noises followed soft woofs, and a crack of light appeared under the closet door; Will’s curiosity was officially piqued. He chuckled and swung his feet out of bed, then shrugged on a t-shirt, carefully tiptoed to the closet, and opened it. Sure enough, Hannibal was curled in a ball of blankets under his racks of eccentric clothes. The dogs sat in a cluster around him, tongues lolling with their oblivious panting. They all looked up as if to greet Will, but Hannibal just blinked, dazed. His tousled hair framed golden brown eyes that still held sleep, reflecting warm light in the modest space.

Will could easily recognize Little Hannibal by now, citing the gentle breeze of innocence and mischief that reached out for his empathy. Tonight there was also distinct, vulnerable fretting and fidgeting that Adult Hannibal would usually keep contained.

“Hi, sweetheart,” Will offered with an encouraging smile.

Hannibal’s eyes darted from him to the darkness behind and back again. He made a frantic gesture at the door, begging Will to close it.

“Okay,” Will said. “I’ve got it.”

Before he complied, he beckoned for Winston Jr. to join them. Then he sank to the floor and sat cross-legged a fair distance away from Hannibal, waiting in patient silence for him to do whatever made him comfortable. Hannibal hugged his knees and rested his chin on them, staring at the wall. Eventually, his eyes began to glitter with tears, but he seemed to relax and stop trembling.

Will coaxed, “Can you speak at all?”

A nod, followed by a delayed, “Yes.”

“Honey, why did you bring the dogs into the closet?”

Hannibal turned his head away and mumbled something indistinguishable.

“Sorry. What was that?”

“I can’t let the wolves get them!”

The words snapped and ricocheted, pleading and quivering slightly as he tried to hide a sniffle. They both sat still for a moment until Hannibal began to fidget again. He smoothed the corner of a blanket through his clenched fist, eyes wandering into a corner.

“I’m scared the wolves will get the dogs. They’re outside.”

Will leaned back and nodded, taking a breath. He could feel Hannibal’s grief in the back of his own chest where it struggled to break free as a scream. Sometimes Hannibal was mute at this age, but tonight he felt secure enough with Will to dislodge the words he needed.

Locked beyond the closet, a storm continued to wail its way past. Their house creaked under pressure from the loudest wind Will had heard in a while. It was *howling* , viciously frothing at the mouth with plush black clouds and snow.

Rosamund and Dante nosed at Hannibal’s hands and licked his face, concern in their eyes while he mustered a small smile for them. Their quiet woofs and headbutts earned them scratches on the head, and the rest of the pack crowded in for their share.

Will grinned, melancholy and fond. Hannibal usually maintained an air of distance from the dogs, but they meant the world to his little self.

Eventually, a particularly insistent gust of wind broke through their sanctuary, making the walls groan in pain and Hannibal flinch. Seemingly on autopilot, he crawled over to Will but hesitated.

Will opened his arms and whispered, “Come here.”

Hannibal practically jumped on him, curling against Will’s side with only his hair sticking out from the blankets. Will held him, gently rocking back and forth. The dogs followed suit and huddled around them, ears perked as they listened to the atmosphere fight its battle.

“I’ve got you,” Will whispered. “We’re safe here.”

For a while the small, warm bundle that was Hannibal did not move or respond in any way. Will nearly nodded off to sleep again surrounded by all he loved in the world, but then Hannibal began to cry. There was no sound, but his shoulders trembled and hot tears stung Will’s arm.

Will sighed, heartbroken at the sight, and rubbed his back while resuming their gentle rocking.

“Sweetheart, do you want to tell me why you’re so upset?”

After a long pause, Hannibal sniffled, “Mama. They took my mama into the forest. She got all frozen up and they took her away.”

“Who did?”

“The *wolves* did. They ate her up and now they’re back to get us. I could see their yellow eyes in the snow.”

Will squeezed his eyes shut and held him even tighter, until Hannibal squirmed in his arms and emerged from the blankets to fix big eyes on him and blink tears away.

“Why didn’t you wake me up?” Will asked.

“Because I knew you’d be out there to protect me. You’ll always protect me, won’t you?”

Will’s voice cracked. “Of course, Han. Of course I will.”

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